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boldface

by

nasser hussain

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
Through English Literature and Creative Writing
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2003

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ISBN: 0-612-84549-4

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 0-612-84549-4

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Canada

abstract

boldface is a collection of spoken word poems. please read them aloud.

acknowledgements

kaley dave burke stephen pender susan holbrook darryl whetter tamara kowalska di
brandt marilyn dumont heidi jacobs dale jacobs carol davison corey thompson
everyone who had the courage to take the microphone at Juice
everyone who had the passion and fortitude to listen at Juice

table of contents

abstract	iii
dedication	iv
acknowledgements	v
do something	1
may 25th nineteen sixty-alive	3
breakfast	4
business speak	5
smoking god	6
jazz is greater than working	7
satisfied	8
my speak	9
railsplitter	10
soyworld©	11
skin	12
a monument gets built	13
spice cabinet	14
stackolee has 2.5 kids	15
for bruce lee	16
worst case scenario	17
blaring america	19
my problem with pundits to the tune of	20
observing in lines	21
dancing in churches	22
in order isn't always	23
abstract egypt	24
metapoor	25
ncomplete	26
not yet	27
portrait suite	30
exercise for the sake of it	37
when i was you(ng)	38
you are unequal to your subject matter	39
half of one, six dozen of the other	41
louis harmstrong vs hornette coleman	42
vengeance stood before me in a line	43
autobiography	44
what i do on lunch breaks	46
right back at you ee	47
satellite	48
summerjob	50
thank you	51

hailing	53
baseball	54
best in its class	55
allah allah saddam	57
the wrong dog	58
how to write an emotional poem	59
executional excellence	62
i don't speak no greek	63
serious problem	64
motto	65
one eight hundred	67
movie night	68
dr. dyson	72
from concept to coltrane	74
i hate vancouver	76
marriage is not ending	78
language is the engine of humour	79
king james and a bag of chips – six transpositions	80
Appendix: statement of poetics	86
vita auctoris	95

do something

do you know what
they been feeding us

do you know

they been feeding us
lines,
man
baloney sandwich
thick lines

what we gonna do

somebody gotta do something

gotta gotta
gotta make a pop record
gotta stop hip hop
and drop a lot of meatloaf
some englebert humperdinck
some weak tea and milquetoast

somebody gotta do something

papa gotta brand new prop
papa gotta all new Pontiac

shock troops of hot sitcom
activists shop for war toys
at FAO Schwartzkopf

watch 'em lop the tops off
the G.I. Joes and burn down
Barbie's pantyhose wardrobe

somebody gotta do something

don't just sit on your laptops
surf

don't just browse
order now

we gotta do something
the time is prime

screaming in HD 3D TV's
goddamn painting giving me
the Edvard Munchies

shot put the pot pipe
and pirate gil scott CD's

somebody gotta do something
somebody gotta get them

a long distance plan
a sneeze guard attack

Lysol angels-
beneficent toilets

can't wait until then

somebody gotta mini putt
that bill payment
slam dunk that legislation
slapshot that deficit

somebody gotta make that
stick and stick and stick
till it don't come out without
oxy clean or elbow grease

somebody gotta write a new line
a faster food line
a slicker byline
use your head line

somebody gotta do something

may 25th nineteen sixty-alive

mouth, out!

fast

I'm so fast

can't catch me faster than

a light switch

candle wick

ding!

ducking uppercuts

made ya stumble cuts

rough mouth sucker

wanna nother ask your

mother may be you can

box but baby can you

ding!

round pound sound

ding! corner cut man

patch eye breathe sigh

ding! in again rope reeling

ding!

ducked,

seven eight nine

look, a ceiling.

breakfast

an old man with sunshine caught between his teeth
drooling good mornings
asks for more coffee

a signpost on your daily paper route
read it eaten forget it and gone
move on

the most important sneer of the day
ham and egg ham and egg and hams and eggs
scram ham sand eggs man damned daily sad papers

truth a hot grill a spatula
white memory handle sticky
blue flame pure as pain
burns hurt now no later

for the waiters out of serviettes and patience
all things being equal to the
bacon skaters on lumberjack griddles
adam and eve on a raft writing riddles
greasy and rhyming, I stop trying

and recall

ham sand egg soar easy burnt oats on the side
and I'm eight minutes into taking five
while the egg sand hammers pound another
cholesterol nail down.

more coffee please
more coiff sheep leads
more cough lotion reliefs

a brief cheese dream omelette

and I rise

flap sleep from pancake eyes
this is
breakfast time

business speak

I'm so close to the means of my production I can smell it. coffee tastes a bit like sweat. the lucid limit of my language. the plastic limit of my overdraft. da doo doo doo, da da da da, that's all I want to scat at you. they call it scat for a reason, but there is no reasoning three hours into a meeting, between floors, or buckled in for the takeoff. my ass is the means of my morning production. the relief of everything I eat. all labour runs to scat. all bacon strips in the end. chit-chat about cat shit. a ruined duvet and the effort to care. pain is a vertical index of humour. the more it hurts, the more we laugh, slapsticks in unison. groins tighten in dark theatres. a piece of work can't get much closer than that. if it looks like a hershey kiss, walks like a hershey kiss, talks like a hershey kiss, don't trust it my friend. I said *don't trust it* because you are my friend even though I don't like you. the best way to make friends is to make friendly. the leeward calmer seemingly. but wind is the collected farts of a ruminant planet, and it's easy to confuse a good idea with breaking wind. in elevators especially. it wasn't me, I'm thinking, and you know it's true since I am the friendly sort. I quit producing before I came to work this morning, so it couldn't be.

smoking god

the basso lung oyster
the shaker of rooms, boom
here comes the choke victim
have you seen him

check the size of his cilia

bending, a palm frond, on a so named beach

rehearsing a death rattle
breathe a new battle

hauling ass
up stairs
he don't need to knock no more

lord don't let me get that sick
lord I'll be good and clean and quick
if you don't let me get dead
lord be my oxygen tank instead
lord tracheotomy, honestly
I don't wanna be hobbled
by the atmosphere
I don't need a new lump
here. I want to pick
plum from the stumps
of a lung orchard at a full run

my ashtray full of guilty
cigarettes, twelve calendars
rolled up and lit
my clothes smell like shit
bits of dried leaf

an addiction seeking missile

jazz is greater than working

what's up bubble?
you wanna ruble?
I got no scruples
I'll rumble ten goebbels
so scramble, goobers
stumble rivers
eject the supers
my crew got new shoes
to kick loose
the booze, I can't
use fluids, I need food
gotta squeeze the sweat
shop out my george foreman
grill
still,
there's so much dead labour to savour
while these machines pick my busy teeth clean
of strewn bones, ribosomes
solo lone tones
from a saxophone blown
forty years ago
I stole the soul
out ma bell's telephone
monopoly boards, dissonant chords
a park place and a rusty ford
the car was coveted by all.
groan loud, jones
me metatarsals splint
me maxillaries grin
spit lick and grind
these giant bones
flying is less form
than aviation
a pure state of mind
is worth more than a united nation
and to the left
diego riveras a christ larger than death
all the new war heads need to get checked
cuz I'm poor broke and dissident
with nothing left but a breath
hanging out my neck

satisfied

coulda picked him off the shelf man
eaten clean to the sinews
satisfied self man
digs my violent blood views
and thinks I be a different colour chalk
 I really get a lot out of our talks
 I like the pretty chicks
 I'm a fucking idiot
 I think I'm ugly and ungainly, why can't I get laid lately
here's the answer you'd rather not hear, I fear
you eat more shit than a professional shit-eater, peter
not his real name either
and my poems don't reach you
you somehow satisfied self man
gratified student on
half a life of milk, and
the rest is just the soup, can
you spit your silver spoon for distance, man?
I knew just where you stood
soon as you said
 conversation is education
I want to make my treads your lesson plan
I'd love to shove my foot and then you said
 if only I could walk a mile inside your shoe
and I actually watched as your white liberal guilt grew
fuck smug snug in a hypocrite's dream jeans
if the best things in life are truly free
I won't make you pay for the beating, please,
I beg you, open up a little wider
the sun shining out your ass is only getting brighter,
my tan is simply skin deep,
my people so much wiser, please
elaborate on why I'm great for surviving your last Kaiser.

I get tired, wanna go to bed.
but the satisfied self man is wrapped up in my head.
I slap my fist with my palm
so it isn't quite as threatening
but the message, the message
as hard as I am sending
is lost.

my speak

is whole block bigger than brooklyn used to the speech till I caught up with my self quick Tennessee like ginger bread from a wolf mouth vocab like monkey see monkey what monkey see monkey what like that edge I got pushed against so close a needle in your ear a needle in your arm and flavour is a warning that time is on a chain that is on a neck and it's just too damn big and heavy bigger than brooklyn sometime I rhyme slow sometimes I run quick I just keep running away just keep running away in my adidas forget the laces I had enough of tying things up it's time to break it down so walk this way walk this way hit it run doo wap shoo wap doo wap shoo wap do dat do disc to diss emma p three two one time broken glass in my apartment now the street is one time too close and so far ladies first an I dodge the needle as it washes up upon a sandy shore on saturday it's a saturday it's a saturday y'all jump like it's brooklyn sized one arm up like a lady inna harbour skyscrapers and everything I speak very fluent brooklyn you know like borough and bodega you know what I'm saying knowwhati'msayinyo pro pop locks and break dance on backs smooth like linoleum supposing it's another jedi mind trick a black eye anna white stick a crosswalk anna boy scout who counts cars wishing he could go far on engine engine number nine on the new york transit line you so sweet and you so fine you done nearly stole my mind around the way my baby got base and a treble is a terrible thing to waste forget the house I'm in your place and out the back door left channels I break beats you leave hairline fractures my speak captures like south African coppers catch kaffirs bigger than ten mandelas on five podiums eighteen arenas and a brownstone short of a building my speak is whole block.

railsplitter

bent back
train tracks
skin black
trace that
sweat stain
 bead

soyworld©

a whole new set
of excellent activists
predict the bend

and now I'm intolerant?

soy joy
 sells
 sex
 nog

soy suns set
 nicely
soy thinks

soy toys
 pants
 gasm
 free

don't soy me
wrong, I have been
beef or you

I cut skins
open, pulped
flesh, salted
ears

gemmed my ohs but good I did

oleo
oleo

soy my soul clean
in case nothing grows

skin

if i start with my fingerprints and follow that panoptical aid to its conclusion i end up on the back of my finger where it mischievously dissipates into the nothingness the unidentifiable part of me (why criminals don't use the backs of their hands) and becomes a wave that cascades into the tiny wrinkles of my first joint too soft to be a knuckle the white bread of a violent sandwich perhaps from there to the second joint the beginning of a shut up the inconclusive circles of silence up to the second history of my gripping flowing into the follicles of fine hairs little islands of primate too short to grind on the ground flat surface of a punch into the web again looking no one else is marked thus they are stretches worn boots inevitable evidence of the effort no matter what i hold you old proteus.

a monument gets built

I
I am
I am a
I am a sla
I am a slave
I am a slave my
I am a slave my fat
I am a slave my father
I am a slave my father was
I am a slave my father was a slav
I am a slave my father was a slave his
I am a slave my father was a slave his father
I am a slave my father was a slave his father was a
I am a slave my father was a slave his father was a slave
I am a slave my father was a slave his father was a slave his fat
I am a slave my father was a slave his father was a slave his father was
great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great

spice cabinet

i was a number and three quarters
and small enough to fit
 in the big wooden spice cabinet
 under the chopping block
 in front of my mother's slacks

i'd hide among the clinking jars
reading
the lion the witch and the wardrobe
so fantastic, such ice white queens
among the cardomoms the papadams
the dry chilis crushed for everything
the cloves stored for
coughing winter mornings

heard the supper preparing
the where is the egg mutter

and a slim brown hand
anticipating interruption
would fish out the nutmeg
and offer

stackolee has 2.5 kids

went to the store for some apple juice like babymoms likes it see. and these mutherfukers keep muttering. muttering i go by and say. you gotta problem? you sayin something like i should know? one says shut up. two say yeah go fuck. and then he comes in, right? bitch i say, and he still comes in. i take the shot and then like i'm goin down, pickin up nickels or somethin, but i ain't hurt. shit. nobody jacks my shit in the neighbourhood. i been here twenty years. this is my hood. mine. people know me, they know me. except one and two. hitting my shit? in my hood? sayin go fuck? so i'm still pickin nickels and then i come up fast wham catch that mutherfuker hard in the belly and one is comin from the side over here and i got the bag with babymom's apple juice that she likes like that and wham i fukin whap that one smash his face with babymom's juice and the mutherfuker is cryin 'n' shit? laid my lugz into two all shit up and broke on the sidewalk like i killed his shit cold. whack in the head and i'm tellin him go fuck? and this one smell like babymom's juice and i knock wham his cryin ass conscious. go fuck right i says. stupid shit keepin his wallet in his pocket even. like he the insurance or some shit. he in good hands, now. mutherfuker. now i got all they shit. know where they live eat fuck and everything like money. like pickin nickels. shoulda seen his shit all bent up and wheezin. people know me. they know me. you mutterin? i did time like this tattoo. kick shit like pickin nickels bitch. and babymoms said don't go back? when she sees my blood lugz. they paid for that. i says to babymom's fuck that and get out my old bangin gear old school knucks chains chucks shiv and kicks like they gotta bitch army or some shit. i catch them two blocks up staggering coughin up. go fuck. didn't even see my shit comin knee bust and a scream punk ass lyin in my shit? my house? i don't care about any shit. bought babymoms juice with one's money. two paid for my lugz. and they still ain't clean? babymoms says where's my juice like i like. i gotta get it.

for bruce lee

two feet
walk on

one foot
hops

no feet
crawls

but

knows
this much

two feet
stand firm

no feet
knows loss

but one
foot one
foot

always
falls

worst case scenario

You are ugly
and no one
want to tell

you about it.
You come to
work one day

and you find
in your mail
a black card.

"You Are Ugly"
in slow gold
gel pen ink.

You fill in
the long blank
from then on.

Reflecting on this
note is wholly
unrewarding, but it

haunts your bathroom
none the less.
It becomes increasingly

difficult to shave
with eyes closed:
a fingertip operation

Why scrub at
all? You are
ugly. You are

the fearsome blemish.
Even pimples cringe.
A facade impossible.

Redeem me, Sir
Pure. I will
blossom at night,

become a beautiful
novella, complete with
portable night light.

Fairy tale ugly.
Butt crack ugly.
Stale elevator ugly.

Fairy butt stale
tale crack elevator
ugly ugly ugly.

You can't say
it any more
than escape it.

You is you
gee you ell
why you ain't

got no alibi
you ugly you
you you ugly.

And the best
they can do
is not call

attention. They manage
this by not
calling at all.

But the beauty
of ugly reveals
a simple truth:

do you know
one person you
are prettier than?

if not, think
about it in
your bathroom.

blaring american

u s a
u s a
you are us
u s a

i wanna be american
like

charles ingalls hitting a grand slam
breakfast and frisk down at denny's
lenny bruce is screaming paki nigger
a grove of freshly squeezed florida orange jews

where curious kids with guns
and curiously twisted white sheets
drive houses with white fences and
whitewall tires
defending dogs with deadly white teeth

forgive me father for i have sinned
gimme twenty to one that the Dodgers win

ok, corral
and special k the chuck wagons
it's those damn no smoking signs
that killed all the dragons

and nobody dies in advertising
lies masquerade as savvy strategizing
stomping down history
like invading aboriginals
no sense in stoppin till you've
carved your own memorial

american like that

u s a
u s a

my problem with pundits to the tune of...

fence watching is a poor sport
played by spoilsports
who choose pure sports

may they die
(a thousand trumpets)
no fences no more

no spoilsports
no sweatshorts
no soiled ports
no no more

may they fly above their
trumpets

no fences no more

observing in lines

in	line	align
bodies	borders	orders
caps	afros	hijabs
bats	black	urdu
you	them	we
and	not	me
in	line	align

dancing in churches

i might not be right
but i am convincing.
i'm not urgent,
but i am pressing
up against your
mental furniture
suggestively. but just
when you do the dirty
dance (react) i pull pure
words from a can of
milk, nice and clean,
nice and clean, so true
so new, that you know
what i mean, know what
i mean? So trite you
nod in amen. some look
on, some look in, scrubbing
circles on frosty clichés,
windowpanes, and i
can't decide which is worse,
dickens or church, a dearth
of bursting hip huggers
on earth. so i look out
and look up, a way
unsure, a dependable
erasure, a saviour for
rock and roll on every
corner, a Savion Glover
tapdancing lover, and
we all call alleluia, alleluia,
alleluia, alleluia.

in order isn't always

a bored cat doesn't even fear grooming. her insides jump, keeping limber moments nearly open. people quite readily saw the underbelly, viewed worldwide, examining your zephyrs.

actually, breathing can drive everything. force gears heaven. immanent juries keen longingly most noondays. often power quits: radiation, solar, turgidity, uranium. vitriol will excuse yesterday's zones.

ample buyers can drain economies for gratis. hope i journal kalashnikov lines merry, not only pedantic. quills really seem torturous unless very wet. extremely young ziggurats.

age bleeds character. doing everything fearlessly gives hours immortality. jiggle kelp. leave mom next. oral poems quickly recede. some turn ugly. violence washes. exit, yet zoom.

abstract egypt

tis is this after several revolutions

this uppity typing

and a refusal to say that this is is

isis

osiris

iris

seeing the dead return

reseeing the rerun

a simpsons

as imps on esses slide down

a pole

or

an

i

tsk, tsk ma cherie

i told you before

i have no sis

only this is purple or risible

metapoor

bull is mean
demeanor is polish
nation is office
cubicle is disinfectant
microbe is science
screaming is not
rope is trying
hold is crop
corn is step
lace is wing
swan is moon
wane is mood
cheap is ease
well is able
cane is walking
song is foot
path is note
memory is ink
pad is soaking
flow is inevitable
resist is stop
sign is read
colour is anger
mean is bull.

ncomplete

unctuation is
nnecesssary and
rrelevant when
nderstanding is
mplicit

not yet

the moment
has passed

the back
end of
a bus
and you
don't run
too fast
these days

so sad
it had
such language
and applied
so directly
to your
life that
you might
have changed
your shirt
before you
left the
house this
lovely morning.

in fact
you just
missed the
defining moment
of your
whole life.

i'm just
so good.

and now
all that
remains here
is exhaust

eleven minutes
quicker and

you might
have grabbed
a hold
of it

crumpled fists
and beat
back the
terror or
dusted the
oppressor or
more to
the point
made a
play for
what matters

now, though
time tatters
are your
legacy. a
beauty queen
sash in
sequins. a
blast crater
in the
desert. a
house of
kindling in
kansas. another
abandonment.
a dead
phone and
no oxygen.

the plain
truth of
poetry and
prophecy is
not yet
my friend

my someday
cadaver, not
yet for

you a
river trip

floating candles

not yet
the light
and the
long tunnel

not yet
the everlasting
saran wrap

not yet
my beast
of bethlehem

not yet
old seagull

crusts wait
for the
final toss

portrait suite

sounds

a sound is

a pound of blue

a pond you

would swim

across

strokes like sable

brushes

tickling

your inner

matisse, or,

ear.

ruler

a ruler

is a history

planned out

in advance

marching,

it inches along,

metering

and measuring

faith

by decrees

book

leafing along,

you gasp.

afterword,

you prolong

for another

introduction.

such touches.

glass

this is intimate

the smooth run

of tongue over

the lip, the ridge

the saxophone

of a drink.

all the intoxication

is an afterthought.

lick.

vein

i clench my arm until

i stand out

i magazine sometimes

i porn occasionally.

cutpurse, i dare you.

this accouterment cost

me a bundle of

nerves. and i'm sensitive

to the light,

besides

all the gazes.

mirror

mirror, what?

greatness?

a changing of the guard?

are there diapers enough?

i looped a parsi to a whale

and potioned a poison

in a prophecy.

i am the sea

that makes reflection

possible.

month

twenty eight butterflies

baked in a pie.

left on the sill

for fortyeight hours

until a thumb thick

high jumper

stuck it in the fire.

we wonder at moths.

exercise for the sake of it

the pun just found you

when i was you(ng)

when i was young and hated puns
when i was Jung and hated puns
when i was you and, gee i hated puns

when i was Pliny and hated reference
when i was hung and hated rhyme
and transpositions all the time

before i got old i disliked euphemism
a constant stream of not say, staying hidden
when i was young i looked for points

never pricked or hung up at all
when i was young i moved like a metaphor
placed bees a foray, and brayed to see

you are unequal to your subject matter

all burns and phalluses
all hoboos and obelisks
all politics laved lovingly
with soapbox staves

all the best of sex and war
are mumbled in these
stutters, a pip in the ocean
so white, so grape

so batten down the hatches
maintain an even keel
the equilibrium of liquid
underestimate the god
in the muffin
ask for blueberry instead

it is just a forest
nothing here to fear
ah, trees, you make
such smooth sheets
good poems to lie with

all ballocks and punk tunes
all scrotal and basketball
all jock strap and release
a long train ride to climax

even if they know you
and your globe and mail
predictions. even if your
coffee don't change
you can comfortably neglect to
leave even the slightest tip.
even if your corporate talents
are latent; sublimated into
powdered sugar and cooler
conversation, please rest assured
that i am humble enough not
to punch your lights out.

i will be the question instead

just who do you think you are
do you think you are just who
just think you do who you are

are you just who you think you do?

all asscrack and airplanes
all ennui and activist
all a part and apathetic
or integrated and mortar
a mason of the psyche
 got a plan a hammer and a blueprint
 got a trick and a wink and a brief stint
 as king of the snow banks
 tall white pyramids
while such rascals scramble for
finger-holds on your one piece
zip-up subject position.

all gender and facial hair
all pinks and blues
so miles to go before
and over there they do things better different
&
more European

all commercial and conformist
all small cars and performance
pocket book and palm pilot
slack khaki environment

i clean glass houses
with the windex i piss.

half of one, six dozen of the other

you wash the brush, the brush washes you

self esteem is the highest tautology

fifty percent of statistics are improvisations

a train is a raincoat at top volume

hammers made the world harder

design assign resign

•

louis harmstrong vs hornette coleman

*Armstrong, though an exemplary figure in the
diatonic tradition, is already forcing us to question
the time honoured belief that emotions constitute
the substance of musical sounds.
-ajay heble, "landing on the wrong note"*

inch fit fuck stop
pop onomatopoeia
sit can't pulls kick
stop on a cat of seeing

this on aunt sis
recapitulation
kin stint marathon
a jay warbles jazzily

this agree aunts
in harm own he use
sacked kraft dinners
per box topper

stop fuck grinding
pit stop dunk
wheels pin foreheads

sensitivity issues
sensitivity issues
propensity is shoes
that fit inch fit stop

come from rests
thank you come again
truck stop

a lot of hounds
meet tarnish amply

vengeance stood before me in a line

skull cap and a half

subheading:

bad ass
sweetback

nervous wallets

twitching back

forward pass

all mayflower

police mean

history.

carrying concealed opinions

a new, literal

folder.

autobiography

i got born
i got beat
i got fucked
i got feet
so i ran

i got a job
i got a home
i got told
i got a go
so i left

i got a stop
i got a watch

i got dollars
i got fed
i got a pillow
i got a bed
so i sleep

i got rem
i got visions
i got alarms
i got buttons
so i snooze

i got up
i got down
i got stereo
i got james brown
so i dance

babybabybaybay
babybabybaybay

i got that feelin
i got moves
i got time
i got you
so i win

i got sick

i got better
i got again
i got forever
so i die

i got begin
i got end
i got story
i got now
i got then
i got nothing
i got want
i got letters
i got haunt
i got shoebox
i got that
i got attitude
i got hat
i got apartment
i got adidas
i got your back
i got reruns
i got mouth
i got keyboard
i got both
i got another
i got over.

what i do on lunch breaks

holy sexual

refuses to
enter discourse¹

or
that course
for that matter.

love is in
lungs lunges urges and lunches
i eat

note on my door:
gone burgeoning-
-back later

¹ a line from Doug Barbour's book *Breath Takes*, 2001.

right back at you ee

my father was never

which isn't to say

he wasn't

just that

he didn't

and i probably was.

& even though

i know

i shouldn't,

i do.

satellite

lay down with the satellite
where's the remote
channel flicker
coffee's black
the image thinner

yes honey, I'm listening
this sunday
the christening
no missing
I'm listening

please cheapen
my lover
I'm sweeter than lower
my equal
my only
tabs fizzing
images dwindling
I'm lonely

Gilligan! sweet skipper
so ginger
the nipple
remote flickers

yes honey, I'm listening
discoveries bristling
teeth whitening
muscle relaxing
lazy boy ears

solo like black coffee
where's the double
double
cleansing bubbles
troubled women
break the huddle

yes honey, I'm whistling
chanel numbers glistening
cat walks quickening

remote channels flickering
images dwindling

please, lover, cheapen
sweetly, lower, breathe, in

my equal so only
my body exploding
tab is fizzing
belly dieting
images flickering
satellites nipping
prime times conflicting

yes honey, I'm listening.

summerjob

those summers
sweating the steaks
boiling the oil
a hundred new greek curses
mixed in the drinks

maria's smooth brown calves

ya moto moo knee sous

dimitri's mile wide mule stance
dangling his dick in the deep fryer

poor fotes johnson
such hair such hair
i burnt it in a fit of pique
set that barbecue lighter to the
back of his curly head

had enough of his ass tactics

and pulled the hard
black plastic trigger

maria's smooth brown calves

and the portuguese word for chicken

gal in gya
gal in gya

i walked out three times
and came back every summer

and labour day
and christmas
and party

a pirate ship of sweat and appetizers
mutinous bounty

i cut a tomato at home
like there's a case left to slice.

thank you

thank you god
for this knife in my back

you're really keeping me on my toes

blades of grass
and no handles
the tang of dew
on my lizard
tongue. halved
brains
scrotum
mitochondria

a long razor
machine made
just for all occasions

energy is for expenditure
expenditure is for change
and change is for good

god of static cling,
god of jingles
god of cherry pits
all hollowed out and affordable
god of stumbles and staircases
what else could be made
in taiwan
these manicured lawns
haunted by our dry garden
hoses, abandoned tractors

now our ploughshares
are beaten back
change is a fact
but regress is a flank attack
history from way back
may appear closer
in a rear view mirror

and this god is a serial killer

and we're working
the most mysterious case ever
he ain't gonna stop
until
he got us all

this is not a moral place
this is not a comfy chair

absolutions and thigh masters

no god,
i don't blame you

i just hoped
it would be sharper

hailing

you who poll votes
you who pool views
you who stole oil
you who sing tang
you who bring thing
you who where as
you who that which
you who know those
you who war far
you who near past
you who fear rue
you who row fast
you who find this
you who fist tines
you who first time
you who smell gas
you who bull doors
you who dull boors
you who pill heads
you who skulk chores
you who chant storm
you who shit chat
you who fill form
you who can't, wait
you who be born
you who birth babes
you who same them
you who gave great
you who choose chance
you who blind faith
you who fruit peel
you who pain taste
you who plain feel
you who pop cans
you who plait waists
you who can do
you who teach learn
you who spies dark
you who pot ferns
you who read books
you who tread bare
you who slip feet
you who over there

baseball

high got the swing
high got the stride
hi de hi, hi de ho

low so below
low got broke
low de la low de lie

high so high
he popcorn below
sweet cherry pop
sweet cherry blow

low neck swing
red neck swung
low stop song
before sing begin

high swung sixty one
sung seventy two
low catch a bat
low strikeout, too

low know no joy
high play de ploy
high got the ride
low got the toy

sigh, games play
so slow for boys.

best in its class

the most popular car in its class
has a nigger in the passenger seat
an arab in the gas tank
and gun turrets for six

the damn thing handles like
it's on rails
thanks to our guidance systems
the damn thing
practically drives itself (leaving you
free)

pre-emptive bumpers
air bags and
whiplash headrests
defenses for bent fenders
and accidents of mass chassis
destruction.

the car alarm instantly dials
levine gittleson tettenbaum shapiro radley powell varley wapner
and associates
to protect your investments

cuz it's the best in its class
and so are you

you deserve to take curves more sexily
you deserve global positioning
rich like corinthians who
follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts
but rather ye may profit

the neighbours won't believe
you can see through
hijabs, burqas
and liberate any woman you desire
custom tinted windows
amplify your better side

fire seduces, and internal combustion
is covert masturbation for public
consumption

three year warranty
zero percent financing
for qualified lessees
and a baghdad of cash
back at signing

best in its class
first overall
and plenty of room
for backseat angels

you won't hear a pin
drop, a protest,
or proust a temps perdu
in our soundproof interior

won't feel a speed bump
or the demonstrative punk
who prostrates himself
for something more gandhi
as you off road all over
their asses

and mileage?

the money you save
will offset the gas gauge
for ten minutes after
you leave the lot

and if the engine runs too hot
send the nigger to pop a gas cap
in the ass of the arab in the tank

a simple solution in these complex times

best in its class
and so are you

ella allah saddam

things have come to a pretty pass
diplomacy is growing flat
for you like your oil in wells
while our imperialism swells

goodness knows where the bombs will be
oh i don't know where i'm at
it looks as if we two will never be one
something must be done

you say eye-rocky and i say ear-racky
you say a monster, and i say a martyr
eye-rocky, ear-racky, who cares about the pakis?
let's call the whole thing off.

you like a miss-isle and i like a muslim
you like pre-emptive and i like defensive
a miss-isle, a muslim, pre-emptive, defensive
let's call the whole thing off.

but if we call the whole thing off
then we must part
and oh, if we ever part
then that might break my bank

so if you like a humvee and i like my freedom
i'll wear a burqa and give up my blue jeans
for we know we
need each other so we
better call the calling off off
let's call the whole thing off

you say civilian and i say beleaguered
you say a just war and i say you murder
civilian, beleaguered, a just war, you murder
let's call the whole thing off

i say an ummah and you say a voter
i say a jihad and you say i work hard
a shia, a sunni, iraq might, but would we?

let's call the whole thing off. Yes, let's call the whole thing off.

the wrong dog

you ain't nothing but a dogma
crying out lies

you ain't nothing but a dogma
trying to survive

your cold war's over
pay the air force overtime

you ain't nothing but an airplane
crashing my side

you ain't nothing but a boeing
flying outta line

you ain't never killed a prez
and you ain't no land of mine

you said you were underclass
and that's just fine

you said you were third world
and the oil's all mine

molten jet fuel and a skyscraping
jihad time

yeah!

if you against us
you ain't an ally

if you refute us
you're evil inside

if you can't muster troops
you better make do with mines

you ain't nothing but an airplane
and you ain't no friend of mine.

how to write an emotional poem²

however it starts,
its gotta be quiet
and then,
get a little quieter

mumble, refer frequently
to your mother's hands
and swallow
between lines.

because losing your inner child is bad
but when your inner child forgets its sweater
you will finally understand that you mother
gave you birth
instead of getting paid
and that they call it labour
for a reason
and that she did it all for your
outer child
because she couldn't reach deeply enough
to remind your inner kid to
stay warm
when the nights are so cold, lonely, and soulless

without her.

you see,

melancholy works best
when composing an emotional poem

there is no joy
in an emotional poem

there is loss, pain, sadness, blackness
like dry roses, metaphors more tortured than your soul is, heart attacks, chokes
back, missing buttons, missing mittens, missing moms
and dead kittens

² many thanks to spoken word artist Taylor Mali, whose piece "How to Write a Political Poem" is the template for this.

and above all there is poignancy.

the whole point of the emotional poem is to be poignant
even if the poem is pointless
the point of poignancy is to point out
out poignant your pain can be.

when delivering your emotional poem,
if at all possible
act as though you are going
to cry at any given moment.

this will make your audience shut up

it's important to make them shut up
because they can't appreciate your
poignancy if they aren't quiet. your pain is quiet.
they don't understand poignancy, or pain.

they're happy.

they wear their shirts
they shave their parts
and no one has ever lost a kitten
their mother, or their sweaters
all their inner kids are playing with
Peter Pan in Neverland forever.

referring to a hackneyed kids'
story will add poignancy

embrace every possible
cliché because you can't
embrace your mother anymore.

always miss
that last chance to say it.

and when you have done this for twenty handwritten minutes
and even you wonder when it will finish,
to end an emotional poem,
just get a little quieter,
teary eye-wiper,
and say the bravest line of all
three times:

I love you
I love you
I love you.

executional excellence

don't just win win
win win win
e-commerce solutions for licensing poets who
trickle down into manageable chunks, let's
position product and bucket
strategically so we can
turn data into information into knowledge into insight

analyze around the gap to engender actionable forecasts, dude

implement appropriate metrics and accountability for leading and lagging
indicators that will track progress
against the strap plan

win win win win?

drive the project ramping down the operation
put it in the parking lot, and,

regardez--rising tides raise all boats!

issue is problem, and value is added

iteration of corporate culture
will engineer passback to shareholders
who
prize granularity of cash burn rate
and
practice ambush marketing.

if results drive the brand soul,
spin
don't drop the ball on the 360
feedback loop
question with clarity and trim the fat
win win win win win
i'm resonating with aha

if the juice is worth the squeeze, say please,
or look up steven covey:

highly successful people or something.

I don't speak no greek

eros rose sore this morn
zeus uses ruses to bazooka big bazoongas boom boom boom
apollo allows solar solos
aphrodite is too difficult
psyche sighs ink, likely
mars all arse and marsh farts
boreas or lord blow
persephone's phone fits purse. say: funny funny
ariadne an abacus adding arachnids
dionysus, i die: wild iodine
athena a then a the ahem then at he
artemis nemesis deliciousness
poseidon poisoned poise. propose portions: purposes per porpoise
orpheus phones o'er us.

serious problem

you got a serious problem
you got a surrealist problem
you got satellite television
you gotta keep running david
you gotta keep running david hassellhoff
the beach is deeper than pamela's tabloid tanlines
and you could just as easily be a stay at home kind of dad
with some bratty kid who wishes he had the cars you did
so keep running david
keep running david hassellhoff
cuz 23 brothers snorting air
jordans
are gonna chase you offa this glass building
so slick you can see your faces in it
so keep running david
keep running david hassellhoff
make a jump cut a blade trim a waist
and land safe in sanitary garbage
no needles to prick that blue blue eye
don't touch that dial
and keep running
keep running david hasselloff

motto

i'm not left wing
i'm left over
the guts that
don't get into
mink stoles, or
garage sale
failures of
character.

i'm not paranoid,
just postmodern
fragments of
special effects
simulacra
voice over.

i'm not resisting.
no really, i insist.
just frictioning
like any good
particle
pass over.

i'm not repeating
not repeating
in spite of some
setbacks, re-
recording
old tapes,
old stories:

the best minds beaten
in with nightstick
politics. a lost layer
of soil means less petrol
for later. running
things honourably
in absentia. proxy
and roll. windows
aluminum and siding.
moose display, horses
are for riding. praxis
express. see them,

with earphones on the
frontlines. unconfirmed
rumours, near the old
valley. the pony is
coming. the vision is reality
you can be surprisingly
literate on the couch

what a good thing to keep in mind

timely, accurate and
thoughtful. you can
depend on me. experienced
hard working and
unquestioning. what
grandfathers knew is
made oil by time.

i'm not arguing,
i'm agreeing.
oh no, i know
what you mean
when you say
that is is
what is was.

we vague all
day, a dance
without brains
under a sky
we made out
of desperation

one eight hundred

have you been
angered, disabled
injured or alienated
by the alarming
rate of injustice
and hypocritical
governmental
incursions into
your personal?
your purse and all?

call one eight hundred who gives a shit

call a million muslims and call 'em up quick

call a radio station and broadcast your complaint
about the state of the beach and your mortgage rates

and i'm not saying i'm
found
but i know when to get
lost

and we don't get
paid unless
reparations are made

so call now:

one eight hundred life ain't right

and our team of experts
will shift the strife,
especially if you are
suing
one rung below

movie night

take out a stain and you got a clean shirt for thursday
teach her to do laundry and your ironing is done forever

someone paints lampposts for money
the ones in my neighbourhood are green

i never herd of a poem like this before

as usual, nothing is planned in advance
this is a line to trip over. i need those

topographic maps for the honeymoon
the hills have lines where i'm going.

lost my boot in a snowbank when i was
six and passive aggressive. i monkeyed

with the tin tan bathroom scale, dialed
the springs to maximum tension, and

pretended a ten pound me. i was good
on the moon.

attack the world with as much wit as
you can muster, and take a hot dog for later

i was an ass man, now i'm undecided

the nominal is not limiting
mug is as good as glass

the world is almost the world

always an ell short, or
a fur long. short linguist,

the inventor, dreams of
unique conventions, combinations, not

necessarily originality. galileo
was a lying leo for a reason

morning noon and night morning
noon and night they yelled titanics

through walls, pillows floors doors
blood in the chilis makes them hotter

no daughters, but two girls.
people are conspicuously absent

from books. leave that
stack industrial. i never figured

out which fence s/he straddled

dismantled factories produce ironic
splits. the ice cream scoops are

square there. a sharp wire
almost took my wife's hand.

she speaks yoga when
she comes. fore fingers

curled to thumbs, three
remain splayed in a wide

meditation. 30 seconds
of kripalu remind me of

a hometown girl and
limber cartwheels. i sprain

easily. you never think of
toes unless you break or have

a fetish. nothing more
ambiguous than a

sign. direct sunlight
blinds and sustains

hard canonical shell
creamy idea filling

inches off your landfill
get cut. a ripped landscape

build a graceful windmill
with a book stolen from

the library. i could salt
the earth with them and who

would notice. hypnotized
by phrases in mathbooks,

i chord the circle. diameter
defeats me especially. the

most important angel sows
dandruff: value added products

aren't so different from

contradictory presidents. i deny
my past. where is my ulna again

wanted a pun and ended up
with people. a white line is worth

a change of subject

position. the pen's smitier
(as in smites more and harder)

than the word. no, no,
you're not interrupting.

a caress without curves
is quite kinky. no errors

with telephone operators.
dial. soap smells.

everybody hurts in athens,
georgia. NO, i said, i'm not

angry, just suffering random

juts in the guts. i shave penitent

shower to shower to stinging to
singing to after shave tomorrow.

it's worth fifteen percent. a girl
named after a muslim mount

made a mixed tape of my
formative years. more form

to come. film at eleven.
they told me you can't

spend what you don't
have. i refer them to

a poem i read in 2003.

all i howl is watered down
blues. latin is dead in south

america. take more photos.
side arm pitcher of lemonade

bricolage is the secret handshake
for our intellectual masons. but

i am not conspiracy minded, fellow.
there's no good way to end a line with

Israelites. there's no good ending
when the oxygen line breaks and

bond james bond has a harpoon
in his pants. some body floats

away, dies off camera.

dr. dyson

sometimes you gotta begin with a demonstration of

power

but the tragedy is that some

people

refuse to understand the ways
in which we are

intolerant

of such an

articulation

that

influences

the individual above and

beyond

the realities of late capitalist twentieth century post industrial rubrics of modernity as they are repackaged, represented, recycled, and reused as plastic hip hop or the mere facade of effective resistance.

and if this makes no sense, just understand

that the importance
of this

the importance

is that the urban space is creating specular and spectacular vernaculars in direct response to the homogeneity and hegemonies that are part and parcel of wearing a paper hat in the first place

and this
continues further into the discursive
communities that were created
in the public mourning that
post di post nine eleven or
for that matter

this

engendered, if you will
manifested
seven eleven

which ultimately
our very bodies into precisely the
required for the kinds of crisis

demonizes, ghettoizes and desexes
commodities

that create
a rhetorical illusion of self
realization

that create

in the middle of

extremely large demographics

both young men
and white women
represent

begin to
and

signify
a suggestive breakage

and if this is

or is not
reality

then one way to accomplish our ultimate goal
is

to find the bottom line

abandon
purity

as an ideal

or

adopt

a radical

new solo.

from concept to coltrane

rhyme is palimpsest the echo and invocation of its sonic sphere it is here and it is song
there and long ago and far a field all balls and rolling blunders make no mistake the
break heralds

the angels we labour under and wonder over lover of where eyes and thighs collide
students colluding about which allusion is most mellifluous or just enough to this
moment a foam speckle in a torrent short wars and long armed warrants cops shock
perps tazers cocked hammers spare power supplies for hair raisers hands up and
don't reach for it no phone call for you dial louie up from retirement we bagged
another ne'er do nothing much less nothing well

hell is twenty bullets
for all the plastic in your wallet
and it's all a simple fallout
a paranoia of accountants
and a bunch of paper options
written on the skins of onions
one october hallowed evening
when the makeup and the artist
who prefers to live in boxes
built of bombs and economics
met in baghdad over breakfast
taking solace in the oil well
gonna run out any minute
so we might as well just finish
cuz my caddy needs a daddy
that can bring home all the bacon
strippers live on all the tipping
not a city in north china
area has got more syllables
than space, or mere, or final
a breath is hopeful when it's taken
sexual if it is stolen
biological involuntary
obligatory or beholden
what you breathing mister biscuit?
while you're in the oven tanning
there's a slave in calico
head kerchief and backlash hanging
on your every single letter
anthologized by our pal norton
who knows that canons are more
suited to the problem of the sorting

and where am i with all my meter
that i pulled from my vain pounding
at the balls of all the umps
crouching calling strike three tiger?

rhythm is the problem and solution

all together now

language got more angles
than a greek theoretician
the great encyclopedia is
full of entries to be written
if it's bitter then it's bitten
and you are too fine for
definition and all this rhythm
leads to kissing. art is always
missing

the long slow lick
the song low kick
spit valve and blow
the pure tone
the saxophone knows
no solo is played
alone

i hate vancouver

i could knock you into the sea, for
i am the earthquake
the insurers assured you wasn't coming

i am the sun you are so
unfamiliar with

i hate you vancouver
for doing everything last
except getting there

i am stronger than your coffee
more potent than your drugs

i am the source of you
you so full of my exes
my axes blunt from too
much grind

i bloom louder than your lotuses

i am prouder than your lethargy
hippies
take your ennui and shove it weakly
on your nude beaches
impossibly tanning

i can see your mountains from here
and i scrape my big ass ontario
boots on them

i hate every child woman and
mancouver
of you

i blew through you like twin chinooks
an ali left hook to your chivalo
and after fifteen rounds of impossible
you're still standing
defiant and world weary
sifting through your flotsam
and orgasms

does the rain fall nowhere
so nostalgically?

no dreads twist tighter
no revolutions righteouser
no vegans veggier
no lesbians lezzier
no sweaters sweatier
no mosaic mosaicer
no boats floatier
no poets poetier

marriage is not ending

you live in the same world i do. so let's kill crows with rocks. if you will. if you won't it won't as it is wont to do. you live in the same world i do. so do two birds twittering, too. singing on my doorstep. signing on my newsprint. a bee pees somehow. and it can fly. you can be up or down. this is the same as trying to be two. this is a powerful comma. come on, you don't expect me to believe this insistence is the same as intensification. no. that is precisely the point. a précis of a pointed critique. they lived in the same world i live in. they insist on living. but you are a life. you are alive. this is the same world as a minute. tastes like a second. helping. this is the powerful period. you are alive in the same world i do. i do the world too. as you do. i like it. i do.

language is the engine of humour

a banana peels because it's funny. peel a word, you might find fruit. peel a banana and find a symbol, just trying to be sweet. can foucault please explain why we spank each other for fun. i discipline my puns impishly. no one is naughty when roleplaying. or occupying a new subject position. there is an agenda afoot. gendering my foot. sexing my walk. fucking my gait. lying down is the ultimate capitulation. obelisk capitalist. what makes a pyramid strong. rendering geometry into literature is risky. now that's a word. there is a humourous hegemony afoot. keep your bananas to yourself, discard the peels, and await the slip, the hijinks, the laugh track derailing a coherent train of thought every five seconds. laugh along. stop when the sign tells you. start again when the sign stops being stop. where does an octagon say temporarily. all it takes to go is a breath. magic when someone waves you in and tells you to go even though you can't hear him. go ahead in spite of the euclid of it all. standing in the middle of the road to beat the yellow. lights come in cereal box colours. look before crossing the sign. why did the chicken transgress foucault. to get the grecian urn.

king james and a bag of chips -- six transpositions

one

my buddy,
who sold art in toronto
swallowed by his fame

why freedom comes
my will is dumb

the hearse comes in at eleven

rivet this day
sour sally sang
and permit us our breakdancing
as we pity those
who discoed before us

and shake our butts to the Temptations

free pizza for the people

sublime as a pimple
john kennedy on a pony

whatever, whatever

amen

two

an hour farther
and we'll stop at 7-11
handicapped parking spaces

but they don't sell rum
and this one is done.

you fucking hogged that one, kevin

gimme that, HEY!
our daddy's dead
and he gave us those buspasses
so we should go home
and drop 'cid again, bud

hash is not enough stimulation

and my liver's incapable

you got the money
i got the car keys

we'll be back in ten minutes

and then.

three

to bother,
getting up in the morning
demands the coffee's made

the bath is run
the towels hung

and deodorants in the cabinet

razor blade shave
after shave, balm
and search for missed places
as we learned to do so
a thousand times before this

keep your nicks from hemorrhaging

with white toilet paper

or aspic and finger
crispy bowl cereal

forget your briefcase

a.m.

four

iraqis
that fart in baghdad
embarrass just the same

as presidents
in elevators

or worse, in oval office

this is to say,
just turn your head
and smile if you know who did it
out of politeness
because no one likes it

when people point out with laughter

four times i've been caught

in class in a car
at the store and renting videos

terribly sorry

ahem.

five

'scuse me
sweet babe in hot pants
haven't we met before

i'm sure of it hon,
at that party, the one

where everyone hung around the oven

my name is dave
i like to give head
and i really like young lasses
so if i said, your bod is hot
would you hold it against me?

no need for protection

and rings don't mean unavailable

this is my audi
meet my pal tony

have you ever been on camera,

my dear?

six

ha childhood
ha fart ha giggle
guffawed hee hee gay

hee laughter haw
haw snigger hee

ha chuckle ha ha ha hee smiling

ha ha tee hee
ha ha hee haw
ha chortle ha ha ha hee jiggle
huh huh choke laughter
hoo hoo ha bum bum

and hee haw snicker diarrhea

huh huh ha ribald

whee hee ha bellow
ha ha ha shucks snifle

ticklish ticklish

hymen

Appendix: a statement of poetics

In *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*, Peggy phelan reminds us that performance is a way around the commodifying tendencies immanent in cultural production(s). I agree with Phelan's statement that "performance's independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength" (149). I would argue, in concert with Phelan, that the moment of performance addresses a "now" that is concealed in the processes and processing of recording(s). During a lecture at the University of Windsor in April 2003, visiting artist Pauline Oliveros commented that the recording of her music was only a pale reproduction of her experience of "being" in the sound at the moment of creation, and further, that the CD could only conjure up a memory of that time, a mere echo of itself.

For the artist herself to admit that a mechanically reproduced copy of her work fails to accurately re-create its original state of being contradicts Walter Benjamin's quiet confidence in the mechanically reproduced work of art. For him, the photograph and the phonograph have within them the ability to import entire cathedrals and choruses into our studios and drawing rooms (Benjamin 283). Presuming the utter fidelity of the copied work permits Benjamin to continue along a dangerous track: when the copy and the "audience" (now scattered, liberated from the tyranny of having to show up and listen to the choir live in performance) come together, it is possible for the original work to be "reactivated" – a moment that recalls rituals and traditions that created the piece of art in the first instance.

But every day, someone sends a postcard featuring the Mona Lisa to a friend back home. Or, if the sender is a more ironic sort, he may choose to send Marcel Duchamp's

revision of the original, *L.H.O.O.Q.* Is it fair, anymore, to say that the *gravitas* of the Da Vinci, or the cultural and political debate sparked by Duchamp and his Dadaist colleagues is adequately invoked when we scrawl "Wish you were here" on the reverse of these postcards? Exactly what rituals and traditions are being made available to us in moments such as these?

Canonically speaking, we have been scrambling our linguistic signals since the decline of literary modernism -- a trajectory that begins (for the sake of argument) with Yeats' Symbolist Rose poems and ends with Gertrude Stein's radical reformulation "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." Godfrey Reggio, creator of the *qatsi* trilogy -- a series of feature length silent films -- offers this opinion about the state of language: "From my point of view, our language is in a state of vast humiliation. It no longer describes the world in which we live" (*Koyaanisqatsi* interview). I can only echo Reggio's eloquent summation: it most certainly does not.

How can language maintain its dignity when we are told that "Coke is it" or that you sincerely "care enough to send the very best" when purchasing a pre-fabricated, mass produced greeting card on Mother's day? Simply put, such linguistic short circuits (what is "it", anyway?) are a precise measure of our relationships to the material world. If nothing else, the "ID wars" of the 1990's demonstrated that people employ language in ways that reveal the degree of their alienation from the "centres" of the discursive trinity of race, class, and gender. I find Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's paradigm of "machinic assemblages" to be particularly useful when trying to measure the interrelationships among humans, the material world, and language. In the section "Postulates of Linguistics" they draw a parallel between the stirrup/man/horse interface,

and surmise that a similar dynamic occurs in language. In other words, the words we mobilize around concepts or objects partially create, liberate, or enable *tangible effects* between the subject and the object: we (man-horse-stirrup) become symbiotically related; we create a new machine (90). The stirrup modifies the human-horse assemblage, making it more efficient and as a consequence enables an entirely new stratum of the population to take up "riding"-- and even as the human-horse relationship is adjusted, so too is the vocabulary. In this case, the lexeme "riding" takes on a new immanence. Another entry must be made in the dictionary to account for this adjustment in the machinery of the material world.

The net effect of the process described above is a field of language in which words are always and already polyvalent, and anything can be made a pun, or contain a double entendre (or a triple, quadruple, to the *n*th degree). This is a source of infinite regress, not of authentication or definition, but of pragmatics. The quest is to find the word that is most suited to its task, to make the subtle adjustments that enable the machine to "run". This level of pragmatic language is commonly referred to as "everyday speech." My argument in **boldface** is that everyday speech and its necessary functionality has been leveraged by the sloganeer and the capitalist in an effort to render language merely symbolic once again. When language is divorced from its pragmatic roots, and we are unable to examine it "in relation to the implicit presuppositions, immanent acts, or incorporeal transformations it expresses and which introduce new configurations of bodies," then our words are vulnerable to the process of commodification (Deleuze 83).

In those cases in which the diction of everyday speech has been used to sell a product, I see the subject putting his/her critical mind to rest for a moment (again, just

what *is* the 'it' in "Coke is it")? The mere fact that such a statement passes for communication is evidence of a collective unconcern for the vitality and importance of our language.

My poetry is deeply invested in this line of questioning. Using the accepted grammars of corporate capitalism, academe, and "street" argot (to name but three), I try to create chains of signification that reveal language itself as an immanence. Single words and phrases can be lifted from the cultural imaginary or what Benjamin calls "mass audience response" and be made to mean something entirely new. In other words: reproducing words, mechanically or otherwise, does not necessarily imply a perfect communication, or a static relationship between speakers/artists and receivers (which, incidentally, would be an ideal situation for the advertiser).

Because this relationship, this fidelity, does not exist, I perform.

I perform because the only tradition worth salvaging is a critical tradition. A critical tradition begins with listening. To listen is to learn, to learn is to become critical, and to become critical is the most vital step in becoming a subject/citizen of the world. I write surprises into my poems, because that is what makes people pay attention.

I wish to create an apperception of our most commonly reproduced medium: everyday speech. For instance, in order to reveal the multiplicity and possibilities embedded in our everyday speech, I engage in straight metrical transpositions of easily recognizable cultural artifacts. The template for **ella allah saddam** is George Gershwin's "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off", just as Elvis' "Hound Dog" was the metrical structure for **the wrong dog**. In the first instance, Gershwin's song is an innocent exploration of pronunciations within the context of romantic relationships, but the *same song* becomes

much more ominous when the language is re-cast along racial, religious, and military terms. The difference between toe-mato, and toe-mahto is a subtle class signifier in the original song. In **ella allah saddam**, this playful distinction moves into a register where the stakes of language are much, much higher. The current war in Iraq, like all wars, is fought with words as much as with munitions.

War is one of a constellation of ideas in **boldface**. I see this collection of poems as thematically linked in and around whatever stage of late capitalism that we now find ourselves. An imagined America -- sometimes glorious, sometimes a buffoon -- winds in and out of this collection. Those poems which feature a first person "I" are often an imagined American negotiating his position as a consumer-citizen in a country engaged in a war that it is burying under a mountain of consumer goods and shiny new distractions (a seemingly unending selection of SUVs, it seems). I highlight my preoccupation with America because I feel as though it is a subject matter particularly suited to an overlooked, but central concern in modern poetics: competition.

Before my readers get carried away and presume that I am advocating a form of amoral Darwinism, or cutthroat capitalism in poetry, I would like to draw a parallel between *competition* and another fearsome and misunderstood word: *jihad*. Contrary to popular belief, the *jihad* is not a declaration of bloody war upon the North American infidel. *Jihad* is simply "struggle". The word represents a self-overcoming, a quest for the willpower needed to resist temptations (the temptation to violence is only one). In the same manner do I understand competition. My main competitor is me. I compete with a culture of passivity (one that I have internalized, by default perhaps) that Slam poet Taylor Mali describes as "the most aggressively inarticulate generation to come along in like, you

know, a long time" (Def Poetry Jam). That said, I also compete with my fellow poets. I certainly do want my share of applause. But it is the quality of my presentation and my words that *earns* it, and further, I find it very difficult to oppress any body in this contest in order to "win". I have never heard of a poetic sweatshop. In **boldface**, competition is both content and process.

In eighteen months between 2001 and 2003, I have performed on stage over thirty times. Approximately half of these performances were at "Juice"-- a monthly open microphone poetry reading that Tamara Kowalska and I organized in Windsor, Ontario. The atmosphere was playful, the smoke was thick, and the content ranged anywhere from crude and revolting to incisive and inspiring. I discovered there were poets who came into the situation with absolutely no preconceptions or experience about reading aloud. I also found serious practitioners, armed with purpose, poise, and certain fetishes about which spot in the evening's order they might occupy. In every case, the audience applauded. Perhaps we were chastened by a raw and emotional poem, or stunned by the philistinism of the amateur poet enacting a self-help program before our eyes, or confused by an utterly personal and abstract take on the simplest of subjects, but in spite of our savage and critical minds, hands met in polite applause. I was (and remain) constantly impressed by the communal and tribal responses that even a poorly conceived work of verbal art can provoke. At its best, however, the open mike reading can be a breathtaking forum for self expression, political intervention, entertainment and enlightenment.

On July 20, 1986, at the Green Mill Lounge in Chicago, Marc Smith and a few of his poet friends developed a new form of open mike reading that has redefined the poetry reading as we know it. The "Slam" is an informal contest in which poets are allowed a

mere three minutes and only one poem to impress five randomly selected judges and emerge "victorious". Mark Smith, having observed "the boring poetry readings of the 1980s," instituted this form because "competition is a natural drama and...an exciting way of ending an evening's entertainment" (Eleveld 118). There was no prize money, no trophy with names engraved for posterity -- a triumph at the Green Mill represented only a fleeting glory. After all, next Sunday night, a new champion would be crowned. In my mind, this is the epitome of competition without commodification.

This kind of fun, low-stakes, and friendly competition has brought poets like Reggie Gaines, Carl Hancock Rux, the late Miguel Pinero, Saul Williams, Sage Francis, Taylor Mali, Beau Sia and a host of other men and women into the public eye. The Slam format has enabled meditations on gender relations like Evert Eden's poem, *I Want to be a Woman*, hyperbolic declarations of sexual empowerment like Maggie Estep's *Sex Goddess of the Western Hemisphere*, and stark portraits of inner-city America like Reggie Gaines' *Please Don't Steal My Air Jordans* (Aloud 425, 62, 65). The Slam poet has at his/her disposal practically any generic form invented, from the sonnet to the concrete/visual. The sheer democracy of the Slam reading, where anyone is invited to sign up and compete, has delivered an equally democratic new category for poetry. Slam is a genre without form, and that is a freedom that I have incorporated in writing and organizing **boldface**.

Formally, there is a politics at play in the composition of a Slam poem. In spite of the countless number of formats available, the Slam poem must have an obvious aural quality. In the words of Taylor Mali:

...that's the Hook, and you gotta have a Hook,
More than the look, it's the Hook that is the most
important part
the hook has to hit and the hook's gotta fit,

Hook's gotta hit hard in the heart

from "how to write a political poem"
(Eleveld 174)

The effectiveness of the Slam poem depends on these hooks -- lines that provoke an involuntary response from the audience, lines that "hit" too fast to be analyzed. The Slam poem must be as spontaneous and fast as the world. But this is not to imply that there is a slavish realism to my poetry. The involuntary response to the hook is the fruit of subversion, a dynamic in Slam that operates at the level of language and in the moment of performance simultaneously.

The Slam poet (and the spoken word artist who undertakes the same formal restrictions) is denied a great deal in his three minutes. Establishing developed characters and "realistic" settings must be done efficiently or not at all. Essayistic analyses of long swaths of history must be discarded long before any audience suffers through them. The Slam poet is left with the present moment, and this is his most effective tool. Stripped of introductory apparatuses, the Slam poem folds the work of art seamlessly into the moment of performance, and by default, into the real time and lives of the listening audience. The work of verbal art is no longer static (as it may appear when written down), but becomes a reciprocal, participatory act.

What is sacrificed is durability -- the poem lasts only in memory, and it usually doesn't "apply" for long. I considered including a poem called **open letter to the spice girl of your choice** in this collection, but the reference had already become stale after only a couple of years. Perhaps a new poem about Britney Spears, or Christina Aguilera, is in order. Reggie Gaines has lived long enough to see Brooklyn youths killed for other brands of sneakers since the popularity of the Air Jordan. All of this is to say that

durability itself is illusory and it rests on the poet to resist stasis, restart his process, retune his antennae, and reengage with precisely what is present before him again and again, three minutes at a time. Spoken word poetry isn't *about* revolution -- it *is* revolution. It is about the constantly recursive cycle between an engaged artist and an equally engaged audience. As in **nike with spikes**, "the nature of the revolution/ is all in the spinning." Perhaps the ultimate hook is a self-evident truth and this is the final and potentially impossible goal of my poetry in this project.

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vita auctoris

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